

During the Second Week, retreatants often find that not only have they grown in intimacy with Jesus, but are also beginning to look upon themselves as disciples of Jesus. The retreat will soon end, yet they hope that this sense of discipleship with Jesus will continue and grow. But discipleship is not simply a choice; it is a response to a call. This was the focus of the Call of the King. Since there are many ways of being a disciple, the retreatant wonders what form her discipleship should take. What is so important in determining this are the retreatant's values and deepest desires. Ignatius Loyola recognized this and thus offers three meditations to help the retreatant ponder her values and deepest desires.

### The Two Standards [136-148]

The meditation on the Two Standards proposes serious consideration of the conflict swirling in the consciousness of each person: the conflict between good and evil. No one, however, is gifted with clear direction in life. Note that Jesus begins his public ministry by saying, "Repent, and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). By calling upon his listeners to repent, Jesus invites them to a new way of thinking, urging them to change how they perceive and grasp reality. The Two Standards invites the retreatant into a prayerful reflection on this.

"A meditation on the Two Standards: the one of Christ, ...; the other of Lucifer" [136]

"meditation" = a prayerful consideration

"standards" seems to denote military banners, but ultimately refers to two value systems

"Lucifer" [136]: Ignatius referred to Satan by many names – 'the enemy of our human nature,' 'the evil one,' and more – but it is noteworthy that he refers to him here as 'Lucifer.' Lucifer means "light-bearer" ("Satan masquerades as an angel of light" – 2 Cor. 11: 14). Satan is a deceiver, the "father of lies" (John 8:44).

"...imagine a great plain in the region of Jerusalem, where the supreme commander ... is Christ our Lord; then another plain in the region of Babylon, where the leader ... is Lucifer" [138]

"Jerusalem" means "peace of God"

"Babylon" (its Hebrew form is "Babel") connotes noise, confusion, and a breaking down of communication

"what I desire" [139]: to understand the tactics of the two leaders, Christ and Lucifer (Note: There is no question of a choice between the two leaders): Each wishes to inculcate a value system.

### The Standard of Satan [140-142]

"Imagine the leader of all the enemy in that great plain of Babylon. He is seated on a throne in fire and smoke, in aspect horrible and terrifying" [140]: Ignatius invites the retreatant to imaginatively "see" this scene. Note: The scene is meant to terrify and rob a person of her freedom.

"[the demons] should tempt people to covet riches" [142]

"riches": the subject matter is not simply money, but also one's home, car, clothes, education, personality, intelligence, physical attributes, the jobs she has held, the people with whom she associates: everything that comprises her life. In themselves, these things are neutral; they are neither good nor bad.

"covet riches": These things, the incidentals of one's life, become "riches" if one uses them to put the "spotlight" on oneself so as to say, "Look at me! Look at all I have done!"

"so that they more easily come to ... honors..., and finally to ... pride" [142]: Such "riches" lead to honors and finally to pride (pride: a failure to acknowledge God as the source of all that one is and has; it is the ultimate deception). Satan is the Deceiver, "the father of lies" (John 8:44).

"honors": security and esteem

“pride”: an attempt to assert one’s independence from everything and everyone, even God

Note: Here the retreatant encounters a ‘spirit’ contrary to that of Christ, and it is depicted not in its obvious ways of working but in its deceits and subtleties.

Note: It is important to recognize that a person is more easily lured, not by obvious evil, but by subtle deception: e.g., by someone who is gracious, well-educated, and polished, a person with impeccable taste and style, like Edwin Arlington Robinson’s “Richard Cory”:

Whenever Richard Cory went downtown, We people on the pavement looked at him: He was a gentleman from sole to crown, Clean-favored and imperially slim.	And he was rich, yes, richer than a king, And admirably schooled in every grace: In fine – we thought that he was everything To make us wish that we were in his place.
And he was always quietly arrayed, And he was always human when he talked; But still he fluttered pulses when he said, “Good Morning!” and he glittered when he walked.	So on we worked and waited for the light, And went without the meat and cursed the bread, And Richard Cory, one calm summer night, Went home and put a bullet in his head.

Note: The value system of Satan is, in effect, the value system of “the world.”

### The Standard of Christ [143-147]

“Similarly, ... gaze in imagination ... on Christ our Lord. Consider how [he] takes his place ... in an area that is lowly, beautiful, and attractive.” [143-144]: Ignatius invites the retreatant to imaginatively “see” this scene. Note: The scene is meant to attract a person.

“Consider the address which Christ ... makes to his servants and friends... that they endeavor to aid all persons, by attracting them, first, to ...spiritual poverty, ...and even ... to actual poverty; and second by attracting them to a desire of reproaches and contempt, since from these results humility.” [146]

“spiritual poverty”: being interiorly free with respect to the incidentals of one’s life. This is not something a retreatant easily desires. Yet in inviting her to ask for this spiritual poverty, Ignatius is inviting her to have at least the desire to have the desire for it.

“humility”: recognition of one’s utter dependence upon God

Note: Jesus is understood to be not simply the teacher of spiritual poverty, but its exemplar.

Note the two contrasting sets of values: Jesus stands for the values we find in the Gospels, the Beatitudes, and the Sermon on the Mount as he calls to simplicity, poverty of spirit, sharing, selflessness, compassion, cooperation, concern for others, community, inclusion, and solidarity with the poor. In contrast, Satan calls to consumerism, competition, narcissism, individualism, exclusion, and suspicion of others.

The Two Standards invites the retreatant to ask herself: ultimately, is my life about me, or is it about Jesus and my willingness to put aside my agenda so as to be his disciple?

Colloquy [147]: “...that I may be received under [Christ’s] standard”: Ignatius is inviting the retreatant to put on “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16); he considers this so important that he directs the retreatant to conclude with the Triple Colloquy.

### Three Classes of Persons [149-157]

first prelude: “Three good people are sincerely trying to serve God and want nothing to get in the way of their relationship with God. Each has something – a possession, a fine residence, a high-profile job, or a particular honor – to which she is quite attached. None of these things is intrinsically evil; each can be used for good. Each person, however, realizes that she is excessively attached to the possession, which each realizes risks getting in the way of a greater good or more generous response to God. Each wishes to be free of her attachment.” (adapted translation)

second prelude: "...to imagine myself standing before God ... that I might desire and know what is more pleasing to God." (adapted translation). Note: This is not a textbook problem, but rather an encounter with God in prayer.

third prelude: "...the grace to choose that which is more to God's glory" (adapted translation)

We now consider the three types of persons. Note: The goal is not to be free of the possession; it is to be free of the attachment to it.

1. The postponer: The first person desires to be free of the attachment, but she so clutters her life with so many other things and tasks to be done that she never gets around to it. Even on her deathbed, she is still thinking about freeing herself from her attachment.
2. The compromiser: The second person also desires to be free of the attachment but, at the same time, wants to keep the possession. She desires to be free of the attachment, but in the end does everything but the one thing necessary. She wants what God wants, but many other things as well.
3. The person wholeheartedly free: The third person also desires to be free of the attachment, but in such a way that she has no inclination about keeping or disposing of the possession. Her one desire is to serve and praise God.

Note: The question is not "to have" or "not have" the possession. Rather, it is a matter of interior freedom (indifference) for which the motivation is always "the service and praise of God." This attitude does not exclude preferences. The third type of person may prefer one option, but she is free to accept the other, if that is where God directs her.

Note: the retreatant who really takes this meditation to heart will realize that she is not in one specific class, but actually in all three.

Colloquy [156]: This meditation is meant to instill in the retreatant the desire to be wholeheartedly free so that she may be able to respond generously to what God asks of her. She petitions this grace with the Triple Colloquy.

Note [157]: If the retreatant realizes that she is not indifferent to riches or poverty, but in fact feels a repugnance to poverty, it can be helpful to pray against this by asking God to choose her for actual poverty. To pray in this way is known as "*agere contra*" = "to act against."

### Three Kinds of Humility [165-168]

Ignatius seems to have long pondered this topic, yet his focus was not so much on humility itself, but rather on the person of Jesus and Jesus' way of living and being.

In the Gospels, Jesus invited people to learn of him because he was humble (Matthew 11:29). Being humble is simply accepting what it means to be human: that we are utterly dependent upon God. Authentic humility thus helps us rejoice in being exactly who we are with both our gifts and our limitations. We can say, then, that the three kinds or degrees of humility are just three ways or degrees of loving God. For Ignatius, the *magis* – the "more" – was something which we should always strive for. We should thus strive for the *greater* way of loving.

Focus: not on any individual action but rather on one's abiding attitude toward God

Each of the higher kinds supposes and includes the lesser kinds: the second kind includes the first; the third includes both the second and the first.

first kind of humility [165]: a person will do nothing to separate herself from God by serious sin. This is serious commitment of love.

second (and "more perfect") kind of humility [166]: a person is interiorly free. Her only principle of choice is to discover and do what God is asking of her. Note: This was the attitude of the third type of person.

third (and “most perfect”) kind of humility: a person so desires to be with Jesus that she desires to be poor, insulted, and humiliated with Jesus poor, insulted, and humiliated, and even considered worthless and a fool as Jesus was considered. Note: It is not poverty, insults, humiliations, and the rest that the person desires; rather, she desires simply to be with Jesus. This is the attitude of a person deeply in love with Jesus. Ignatius says that if a person understands what this third kind of humility means, but does not feel the desire for it, she can still pray for the desire to have the desire (*Constitutions* [102]).

Colloquy [168]: The retreatant petitions this grace with the Triple Colloquy.

## The Election

The word ‘election’ comes directly from the Spanish *la elección* meaning ‘choice’ or ‘selection’ or ‘decision’ about one’s life. The election properly understood, however, is not so much something a person decides as it is something she *discerns*.

Election: the process of selecting or choosing the direction of one’s life with Christ

process: as a general rule, the election will demand time; it can’t be rushed

the direction of one’s life: the subject matter is substantive, even life-changing (rather than an everyday decision)

with Christ: the election is relational: “What is Christ asking of me?”

choosing the direction of one’s life with Christ requires:

knowledge: of Christ’s way and of Satan’s antithetical way (Two Standards),

commitment: grounded in interior freedom (indifference) (Three Types of Persons),

love: (Three Kinds of Humility).

Notice the developmental progression from knowledge to commitment to love.

Times of Election [175]: spiritual situations of diminishing degrees of clarity in which the election (i.e., a substantive decision about the direction of one’s life) is made

first time: the focus is on what God does in the person to effect the election (the election is not the result of anything the person does; the election is something that happens to her)

second and third times: the focus is on what the person does in making the election

fourth time (only implied): acceptance of a situation where no choice is possible (e.g., age, infirmity, death of spouse, being the very person one is, etc.)

First Time [175]: “when God our Lord moves and attracts the will in such a way that a devout person, without doubting or being able to doubt, carries out what is proposed.”

“For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want” (Romans 7:18)

St. Paul recognized that the will to do the ‘good’ was in him, but the power was not.

St. Paul understood that recognizing the appropriate course of action was different from choosing it.

During the first time, however, recognizing the appropriate course of action and choosing it coincide.

The person is brought to an awareness of the appropriate course of action in a manner that so overwhelms her understanding that her ‘choosing’ it arises not from her will but from every fiber of her being. (In truth, there really is no ‘choice.’)

“It frequently happens that Our Lord moves and urges the soul to this or that activity. He begins by enlightening the soul by speaking interiorly to it without the din of words, lifting it up entirely to his divine love and ourselves to his meaning without any possibility of resistance on our part,

even should we wish to resist. This is in conformity with the commandments, the precepts of the Church, and obedience to our superiors because the same divine Spirit is present in all.” (letter of Ignatius Loyola to Sr. Teresa Rejadell, June 18, 1536)

In his book, *Perelandra*, C.S. Lewis describes a ‘first time’ election. The protagonist, Ransom, has been taken to Venus, an Eden-like world that has never known Sin. There he meets Weston, whom he gradually realizes is not simply an agent of Satan but Satan’s very self in human form. Suddenly, he realizes his own role: He has been sent there ... by God ... to kill Satan. The future and the freedom of Venus are in his hands, yet the very thought of what he finds himself being called to do terrifies him, and he endures a great interior struggle. Suddenly, the decision is clear: “The thing was neither more nor less dreadful than it had been before. The only difference was that he knew – almost as a historical proposition – that it was going to be done. ... There was going to arrive, in the course of time, a moment at which he would have done it. The future act stood there, fixed and unaltered as if he had already done it. You might say that the power of choice had been simply set aside and an inflexible destiny substituted for it.” (C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* [New York: Scribner, 1996], 149)

Second Time [176]: “when sufficient clarity and knowledge are received from the experience of consolations and desolations, and from experience in the discernment of various spirits”

This is the ‘ordinary’ method of making an election and is best described by means of a story. I append the story, “Ignatian Discernment,” to these pages.

Third Time [177]: “one of tranquility: when the soul is not being moved one way and the other by various spirits and uses its natural faculties in freedom and peace.” The person employs not her feelings but her reasoning (and imagination).

Third Time: First Method [178-183]: In this method the person employs her reasoning.

After begging for enlightenment, she gathers information for and against the matter being discerned.

Reason, guided by faith and free from the influence of any attachments, reveals the best choice.

The decision is then offered to God with a request that God confirm the decision.

Third Time: Second Method [184-188]: In this method the person employs her imagination.

After begging for enlightenment, the person considers the decision from three perspectives:

1. the advice she would give to a friend,
2. what she would wish to have done on her deathbed, and
3. what she would wish to have done when she stands before God.

These considerations reveal the best choice.

The decision is then offered to God with a request that God confirm the decision.

Notice that this allows the person to ‘stand back’ and consider the matter objectively.

Concluding Thoughts: The Second Time of making an election (based on affections) and the Third Time (based on reasoning and imagination) are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they complement one another. In other words, most elections are the product of both Second and Thirds Time methods. Ignatian discernment entails simultaneous attention to (1) the continuity of thoughts during reflection, (2) the feelings which accompany these thoughts, and (3) the developing understanding which results from both these thoughts and feelings (felt-knowledge).

Finally, it is important to recognize that the Spiritual Exercises will always have a positive transformative effect on a person who makes them with sincerity and generosity. The person may not make an explicit election, yet the personal transformation she experiences while making the Exercises, even if she is unaware of it, is nonetheless an election: an implicit decision to be ever more responsive to God’s direction and guidance in her life.

## Ignatian Discernment:

One afternoon in March 2003, I received a phone call from my provincial superior. I wasn't surprised that he might phone me, but the purpose of his call certainly was: he had phoned to invite me to become the vocation director. (The vocation director is responsible for assisting men discerning God's call in their life and then, if he judges a man to have a Jesuit vocation, in guiding him through the application process.) I had only recently returned to California after having served almost two years as Secretary for Formation at the Jesuit Conference, our national offices in Washington, DC, and then more than five years as Undersecretary of the Society of Jesus at our General Curia in Rome. Those years had had a profound effect on me: on my relationship with God and on that which I found myself drawn to doing in the future. Upon returning to California, I was assigned to our high school in San Francisco, where I did the academic scheduling, taught two math classes, coached cross-country and track, and enjoyed two of the happiest years of my Jesuit life. But at the same time, I had written reflections on the Jesuit vocation, formed a Christian Life Community group and a vocation discernment group, and begun to direct some students in prayer. I suppose that because I had shared this with my provincial superior helps explain his phone call. My first words in response to his proposal "You've got the wrong guy!" To his credit and my own undying gratitude, he didn't take my response as a no. Rather, he began a conversation which continued for the next week and a half and resulted in my eventually saying yes to his proposal, something which I have never regretted. By the time that week and a half ended, I had discerned that not only was my provincial superior inviting me to be vocation director, but so too was God. I want to explain how that happened, but first I want to explain discernment.

Discernment can be thought of as a process resulting in a decision, but it is a process that is grounded in an attitude of openness to God and a sincere desire to do what God is asking of us. If we are truly open to God and sincerely wish to live in accord with God's desires for us, there will be many small decisions in our life – doing a small act of kindness, avoiding a situation that may bring harm to another – that we will make almost without thought or reflection: the right decision will be immediately clear to us by a felt sense of rightness, peace, and even joy. But there are other decisions, considerably more substantive and potentially life-changing – to leave our current job for another, to enter a seminary or religious life, to return to school to complete our college degree or to earn another degree – for which discernment will truly be a process. It is decisions such as this that I wish to address. What is discernment? Discernment can be defined as a process of determining to the best of my ability what God is asking of me right now. Now allow me to unpack that.

First of all, discernment is a process, and processes – such as the production of fine wine – demand time. If my provincial superior had asked for my response to his proposal before I went to bed that evening, I may have been able to give it to him, but it would not have been the result of discernment. Discernment can't be hurried; it takes time. The specific amount of time demanded depends on our relationship with God and our familiarity with the discernment process. A person with a long-standing relationship with God who is familiar with the discernment process will normally need less time than one who has a new relationship with God and is unfamiliar with discernment.

Second, it is a process of determining something to the best of my ability: Discernment will demand considerable effort of us, but there is nothing about it that guarantees that the resulting decision reflects what God desires for us. The decision may seem right, but discernment always involves an element of uncertainty – and we will see later how this is addressed.

Third, it involves what God is asking of me. Ignatian discernment and, for that matter, all of Ignatian spirituality are grounded in the understanding that God is actively engaged in the life of each and every one of us. God's creative action in our lives didn't end at the moment of our conception or birth; it is continuous and ongoing. God is actively engaged in the life of each and every one of us – inviting us, directing us, guiding us – to help us achieve the fullness of life which God desires for us. Allow me to explain what I mean by telling a story. Almost 500 years ago, a Basque courtier-soldier, Iñigo Lopez de

Loyola, the man we know today as Ignatius Loyola, lay in bed recovering from battle wounds that had almost ended his life. Looking for something to help pass the time, he asked for some books. He wanted some of the novels about knights and battles and beautiful women that he particularly liked, but the only books in the house were a life of Christ and book of stories about saints. I suspect he wasn't happy, but he took the books and began to read. From time to time, he put his book aside and allowed his thoughts to wander. As might be expected, he imagined himself as a valiant knight in the service of a great lady. But his thoughts also turned to what he had read, and he imagined himself imitating the heroic deeds of the saints in serving God. He began to notice, however, that his thoughts evoked different reactions in himself. Thoughts of himself as a valiant knight, although delightful while they lasted, ultimately left him feeling empty and sad, whereas thoughts of imitating the heroic deeds of the saints brought him a joy that lasted long after these thoughts had ended. Then, one day his understanding opened, and he began to wonder at this difference and reflect upon it. It dawned on him that one set of thoughts was directed toward God and presumably had its origin in God, whereas the other was not. He realized that God was both present and actively engaged in his life. He thus began to turn to God and open himself to God. His spiritual journey had begun.

Over the course of the next year, he was brought to understand that the God of infinite love was actively engaged, not only in his own life, but in the life of each and every person, offering them direction and guidance, to help them achieve the fullness of life for which God created them. Yet he was also brought to understand that God normally acts in us, not through extraordinary experiences, but rather through the ordinary events of our everyday lives. But in this regard, it is not the events themselves that are key, but rather the affections they evoke in us – the feelings of joy, peace, hope, anxiety, sadness, and fear we commonly experience in our everyday lives. These feelings, he was brought to understand, are not just fleeting human emotions, but rather the means by which, through faith, we can recognize God's actions in our lives, urging us toward one action or away from another. He understood that if we wish to live in accord with God's desires for us, then if we do act in accord with God's desires, we will naturally feel a sense of rightness, peace, and joy. It is an indication that we are probably on the right path. Conversely, finding ourselves unsettled, anxious, and fearful in response to our action indicates that we are probably on the wrong path. But he also recognized that finding ourselves at peace or unsettled in something does not necessarily mean that God is affirming or rejecting anything. Discernment, we will see, is ultimately a convergence of many factors, all of which need to be weighed and evaluated in the quiet of our hearts.

Fourth, discernment is a process of determining what God is asking of me. In a word, discernment is personal. It has nothing to do with universal norms, nor with what God is asking of you or of anyone else. Only I can discern what God is asking of me. Only you can discern what God is asking of you. Other people can assist you in your discernment, but only you can discern what God is asking of you.

Fifth, discernment is a process of determining what God is asking of me right now. God is not inviting the person I hope to be, but the person I am. I might want to have a stronger relationship with God, or better speaking skills, or to be more adept at any number of things, but God is not inviting that person; God is inviting me as I am right now. But discernment says nothing about what the future might hold for me. My discernment was not about any success or failure I might experience as vocation director; it was about accepting my provincial superior's invitation to serve in that capacity. And in this, there is great need for both generosity and courage.

Now, to give you some perspective on discernment, allow me to continue my story. I was thrilled that my provincial superior thought enough of me to ask me to take on such an important position, but it was a form of ministry in which I had never been engaged and demanded skills that I wasn't sure I had – and I knew that I did have the skills of a teacher and a coach – and I had just experienced two of the happiest years of my Jesuit life. What was I to do?

My provincial superior had phoned me in late-afternoon on a Tuesday. Within moments of receiving his phone call, I shared the news with members of my community, and later that evening I phoned my sister and a close Jesuit friend. I valued their reflections, and I paid particular attention when my Jesuit friend said that he didn't feel that it was a good fit for me. Several times over the course of the next few days, I sent e-mails to my provincial superior, updating him on my discernment, and on Saturday, I put all my thoughts into a long letter which I sent by e-mail. The following morning, he phoned me: he was in the neighborhood; could he meet with me that afternoon? We met for 45 minutes. During our meeting, he made it clear to me that I was not simply a name on a list of names. It was a list of one. He explained that he wanted me and why he wanted me. It was wonderful to feel appreciated, and over the course of the next fifteen or twenty minutes I found myself increasingly drawn to saying yes, but he stopped me. He explained that he was leaving the next day for some meetings in Rome. He'd be gone for a week; we could continue the conversation when he returned. Over the course of that week, I continued to ponder his proposal and found myself increasingly drawn to accepting it. On Friday of that week, I sent him an e-mail to say that I was accepting his proposal. The following Monday, he phoned me and, after a brief conversation, appointed me vocation director. I have never regretted saying yes.

What happened? First of all, I investigated what the job entailed and began to mentally list the reasons in favor of accepting it and those against it. I also spoke with people who knew me well and listened to their input. I also imagined myself as vocation director, and then imagined myself as having refused to accept the position. I pondered and continued to ponder the result of all this and paid particular attention to what excited me and what gave rise to anxiety. In all honesty, even before I met with my provincial superior I found myself drawn to accepting his proposal. I realized that my close Jesuit friend felt that it wasn't a good fit. I valued his input, but it was my decision. During my meeting with my provincial superior on Sunday afternoon, I was impressed that even when I wanted to say yes, he asked me to wait. That week gave me time to sit with my decision and to grow more and more comfortable with it. That week helped me to confirm that I had made the right decision. Discernment ultimately involves not only a decision, but a heartfelt effort to confirm that decision.

Discernment is a product of both the head and the heart, and so too was mine. I investigated what the job entailed, began to understand the advantages and disadvantages of my taking it, and spoke about it with people who knew me well – but I also pondered all this and paid particular attention to what my heart was telling me. But there was something else at work here, two things in fact. The first were my values. Down deep, what was really important to me? What animated me? What did I ultimately want to do with my life? In all honesty, as much as some aspects of the job frightened me, the job as a whole was something I felt passionate about. I wanted to do it! We may find it difficult to express our values, but they are that 'something' that defines what each of us is really all about and what we ultimately want to do with our lives. The second thing that was at work in my discernment was openness to follow God's guidance or what might be called interior freedom. If my discernment was going to have any meaning, I had to be free enough to put aside my own agenda and follow the guidance God gave me. This interior freedom is grounded in an abiding trust in God.

Sigmund Freud may have approached life from a different perspective, yet he seems to have had a clear understanding of the distinction between decision-making and discernment: "When making a decision of minor importance," he observed, "I have always found it helpful to consider all the pros and cons. In vital matters, however, such as the choice of a spouse or a profession, the decision should come from the unconscious, from somewhere within ourselves. In the important decisions of personal life, we should be governed, I think, by the deep inner needs of our nature." What Freud was saying was that decision-making often involves little more than serious consideration of the pros and cons of the matter at hand, whereas discernment is ultimately grounded in something much less tangible, something which we may find ourselves at a loss to explain, even to ourselves – something which he called "the deep inner needs of our nature" and which we might speak of as our relationship with God, our attentiveness to our inner world, and our desire to respond to the direction and guidance God gives us.



Discernment is a repetitive process of prayerfully ‘pondering’ or ‘mulling over’ the options facing you. Although it is a fluid process that really can’t be divided into distinct stages, it begins and takes place in the context of an active relationship with God, a relationship in which you are both attentive to God and open to the guidance God gives you. You need to learn as much as possible about each of the options you wish to consider: read everything you can find about them, and speak with others about them. You should also discuss the matter with those who will be intimately affected by your decision, such as your spouse and children. As you do so, pay particular attention to the reasons in favor of each option and those against it. Moreover, notice what stirs within you as you do this: where you find joy and inner peace, and where you find anxiety and fear.

It is important to recognize, however, that discernment is a continually changing phenomenon. Not only does all that you read and discuss and imagine and ponder about the matter you are considering continue to change, but so too does your reaction to it. Each new thought or insight that you gain sheds new light on all the thoughts and insights you already have. Thus something which may once have evoked a sense of fear no longer does so, and something which may once have seemed unimportant gains importance. Thus discernment is a *repetitive* process of prayerfully pondering the options facing you. It takes place in the context of a continually evolving active relationship with God, a relationship in which you need to be both continually attentive to God and continually open to the guidance God gives you.

As you continue with your discernment, some options should of their own accord gradually fall by the wayside while others become more attractive. Your discernment should gradually move you toward a decision, but making that decision does not end your discernment. You then need to confirm that you have made the right decision, and you do this simply by sitting with your decision. If, as you do so, you find yourself increasingly peaceful, perhaps even joyful, with the decision, then you have probably made the right decision. If, on the other hand, you find yourself increasingly unsettled and even sad about the decision, you need to return to your discernment and continue with the process. Finally, even after you have made your decision and have begun to implement it, you should continue to seek to confirm that your discernment has indeed resulted in the correct decision.

Now allow me to summarize discernment. We saw that discernment is a process of determining to the best of your ability what God is asking of you right now. It is grounded in:

- the understanding that God is actively engaged in your everyday life
- an active relationship with God,
- a sincere desire and the interior freedom to do what God is asking of you, and
- reflection on the ordinary events of your everyday life to discover God’s direction and guidance.

It will demand of you:

- willingness to devote sufficient time to the process,
- willingness to seriously investigate the matter being discerned: to read, discuss, imagine, ponder
- attentiveness to your inner world: What excites you? What causes anxiety? Where do you find joy or sadness, peace or anxiety?
- attentiveness to your values, and
- willingness to confirm your decision after making it.